

MENNONITE HISTORICAL BULLETIN

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A Brief Sketch of the Origins and Growth of the Beech Mennonite Church

WILLARD S. KRABILL

Perhaps the most moving story of all human history is that of the growth of the Christian Church, including the countless episodes of sacrifice, martyrdom, and migration "for conscience' sake" on the part of the men and women whose faith has given us the Christian churches of the twentieth century. This moving story was revealed to me more personally than ever before as I studied the history and origins of my own congregation, the Beech Mennonite Church, approximately five miles northeast of Louisville, Ohio. This study challenged me to a deeper interest in and appreciation for the heritage of our own congregation, for here in this northeastern Ohio community has been enacted one of the chapters in the story of the Mennonite Church.

Origins in Europe

To begin the story of the Beech Church we must go back to the Swiss Brethren of the seventeenth century. Prior to 1693 the Brethren had suffered no major schisms, but in this year an elder named Jacob Amman, and his followers, broke with the main body of Brethren over the question of avoidance as dealt with in Article 17 of the Dutch Dordrecht Confession of Faith. There was also involved a controversy over clothing regulations (Amman taking the stricter view), but it was only a minor issue. It should be remembered that Amman also introduced the practice of feet washing among the Brethren, having adopted it from the Dutch Mennonites. Heretofore this practice was not observed among the Swiss Brethren. The forebears of the Beech congregation were followers of the Amman party and after this time were known as Amish and considerably later as Amish Mennonites. The name "Mennonite" was more or less a nickname for the European Anabaptists, but in America it became the official name. These ancestors of ours were Swiss, but in the following years they joined the strong movement of Brethren from Berne to the province

of Alsace in France where they secured military exemption by the payment of a sum of money.

Migration to America

The first large migration of Mennonites to America occurred from 1709 to 1754. This group consisted largely of Palatine Mennonites, but included some Amish Mennonites. However, these Amish were Swiss, not Alsatian, and they settled in eastern Pennsylvania. The second wave of immigration, 1815-1861, was brought about by the French government's withdrawal of military exemption to the Brethren. The Brethren petitioned the



Beech Mennonite Church, Louisville, Ohio

emperor, Napoleon, in vain. There were but two alternatives: either they must give up nonresistance, or they must emigrate. The founders of the Beech congregation chose to emigrate, and in so doing became a part of the large group of Alsatian Amish which migrated to North America during those early nineteenth-century years. Thus they preserved their principle of nonresistance.

There was considerable difference between these Alsatian Amish and the Swiss Amish who had come to America one hundred years before. The intervening century had seen the Alsatians grow more progressive in their thought and practice. Nevertheless, the men who founded the congregation in Stark County, Ohio, were typical Amish, with broad black hats, beards, hooks and eyes, and other distinctive characteristics.

Settlement in Stark County, Ohio

The Amish community near Louisville was established by direct migration from

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Samuel D. Guengerich

A. LLOYD SWARTZENDRUBER

Samuel D. Guengerich was born in Somerset County, Pennsylvania, August 25, 1836, and died January 12, 1929, near Wellman, Iowa. He married Barbara Beachy, daughter of Joel Beachy and Elizabeth Gnagy Beachy. He was the oldest son of Daniel P. and Susana Miller Guengerich.

He was a lifelong member of the Amish Church, having become a member in his youth, laboring earnestly to promote the work of the Lord in the church of his choice.

He began his education at the age of six, but in his "History of My School Days" he says, "I did not learn much." The reason he gave was that "I was young and did not know the value of learning," and "the teachers that I went to in the first years did not pay much attention to the small scholars."

His school days were somewhat interrupted by moving to Iowa when he was eight years old. He attended school again at the age of fifteen and until he was twenty, but only at intervals. This "History" gives his occupation as "carpenter and joiner trade," and says, "I took

a notion to attend the Normal School in the Borough of Salisbury in order to prepare myself for teaching." It closes with the following paragraph: "I hope by diligent study I may be progressive and by and by the qualifications with which a teacher must be endowed to facilitate him in his profession." This history is dated October, 1863, at Salisbury, Somerset County, Pennsylvania, and is signed by Samuel D. Guengerich. His teacher's certificate is dated at Millersville, Pennsylvania, September 12, 1864.

He took his preparation for teaching seriously, and in writing his assignments he wrote several essays. Some of these have been preserved and are now in the Mennonite Archives at the Mennonite Historical Library at Goshen College, at Goshen, Indiana.

In his essay on "The Value of an Education" he says, "A good education and well cultivated mind may be regarded

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Europe. There was no interim American home for these people. The first immigrants were Michael Schloneger, and his brother-in-law, Jacob Conrad, who settled east of Louisville in 1823, eleven years before that town was formally established. A certain John King, a Swiss Amishman from Pennsylvania, joined Conrad and Schloneger in making the early settlement near Louisville, but after a number of years he and his family moved away from the district, probably to Pennsylvania. Upon reaching Ohio, Jacob Conrad and Michael Schloneger first contacted Jacob's brother, Daniel, in Wayne County, Ohio. But after a few months they returned some thirty miles eastward and settled on land which is still owned by their descendants. As previously stated, John King soon moved away, but the Conrad and Schloneger families remained; in fact, they lived together until each had six children. Thereupon, they drew broomstraws to decide which one was to move and Michael with his family moved to buildings a short distance away but on the same tract of land.

Family Names

Other Alsatian Amish soon joined this settlement. These families bore the names of Klopfenstein, Miller, Linder, Schmucker, Yoder, Becher, Ramseyer, Krabill, Sommer, and Graber. Except for Klopfenstein and Ramseyer, and including the original name of Schloneger and Conrad, the majority of present-day members of the congregation have these same names.

Early Ministers

In the early years of the settlement they worshiped in a small log meetinghouse on Michael Schloneger's farm, but they soon outgrew this structure and until 1877 meetings were held in the homes of the members. When Jacob Conrad settled near Louisville, his father Jacob soon joined him. The elder Jacob had been a minister of the church in Alsace and, therefore, in America he became the first minister of the Beech congregation. Joseph Ramseyer, another early settler, also served the church as minister. John Schloneger, the son of Michael, was the first resident bishop of the congregation, serving from 1848 to 1859. In 1863 John's brother, Michael, Jr. (who was born on the ocean), and Joseph Becher were ordained as ministers, and in 1870 Michael became bishop. David Maurer was ordained as deacon sometime before 1850, and after the death of John Schloneger in 1859 until the ordination of Michael Schloneger and Joe Becher in 1863, the leadership of the congregation was in his hands. In 1888 John Sommer was ordained a minister (died 1915), and Daniel Schmucker was ordained deacon (died 1925). John Liechty was ordained as a minister in 1903, and though he moved to Orrville he still visited and served the church regularly until his death in 1947.

The Change to "Amish Mennonite"

The one-hundred-year interval between the Swiss and Alsatian Amish immigra-

tions became more significant in the middle of the nineteenth century. The Alsatian groups such as the Beech congregation (which had become more progressive during the century intervening) began to worship in churches, introduced a few modern innovations, and attempted to organize an Amish Mennonite General Conference. This attempt failed, however, and the differences between the two groups became more evident. The more liberal conference group was soon known as "Hoch Amish" while the more conservative anti-conference group was known as "Nieder Amish" or the "Old Order." The Beech Church became one of the Amish Mennonite congregations which was organized into the Ohio District Conference in 1893. In 1897 the Amish Mennonite churches of Pennsylvania joined the district conference and it became known as the Eastern A.M. Conference.

Location of Church Building

In 1877 the Beech congregation built a meetinghouse on the site of the present building. There was some controversy as to whether the church should be located east of Louisville near the site of the old Schloneger cemetery or at a more central location to accommodate those families living farther north and west. It was decided to build the church at the present central location, but until the 1890's they continued to use the old Amish cemetery. At this time they established a new cemetery adjacent to the church building, and in the late 1930's interments began to be made in a new addition to this cemetery. It is very interesting to visit the old Amish burial plot located on the farm now owned by one of the present ministers of the church, John D. Miller.

The first building was a brick structure with the entrance at the east and the pulpit at the west end. In 1908 an addition was built onto the south side. The entrance was changed at this time to its present location on the south and the pulpit was moved to the north.

Remodeling

When a windstorm damaged the church building on April 1, 1929, it was decided to remodel the church. In the meantime, services were held Sunday afternoons at the Center Church of the Brethren southwest of Louisville. The young people's Bible meeting was held conjointly with the young people of the Canton Mission. The interior of the building was relined, the benches were replaced, and an addition was made on the north side to provide classrooms for Sunday school. In 1939 the basement was completed, providing indoor toilet facilities, quarters for the primary Sunday school, and facilities for the serving of meals to conference or chorus guests. At this time also, two oil-burning furnaces were installed. Thus the church stands today as a large, modern, convenient building equipped to serve the congregation in every way.

Early Practices and Customs

Church practices and attitudes of the Beech congregation were similar to those

of the other A.M. congregations of this period. The bishop's word was law in the local congregation. All preaching was in German until after the ordination of J. A. Liechty in 1903, but after the death of John Sommer in 1915 nearly all services were in English. With the death of Deacon Daniel Schmucker in 1925 the German language was dropped entirely. The attitude of the church on clothing regulations is evidenced by the fact that as late as 1888 Bishop Michael Schloneger refused to marry a couple until the brother bought a new suit with hooks and eyes. But such things as beards, hooks and eyes, and severe dress regulations ended with the Ohio Amish Mennonite Conference in 1893, and all such Amish customs gradually disappeared. In 1912 questions were raised as to whether a certain brother should be permitted in the lot for the ministry because he owned an automobile, but a major issue never developed. The lot was employed as the method of choosing the ministry until 1903 when J. A. Liechty received the majority of votes for nomination as minister and was thereupon ordained. The lot was used again in 1912 when John D. Miller was ordained, and also in 1915 when Alvin Hostetler was ordained. Since 1915, however, the lot has never been used, and the present bishop and deacon were chosen by vote of the congregation.

The Sunday School

A union Sunday school was conducted as early as 1876 in the Scenery Hall Schoolhouse, by three men in the community: Jacob Ramseyer (an Amish Mennonite), Ephraim Pickens (a United Brethren), and a Stuckey (a Dunkard minister). Due to the efforts of Jacob Ramseyer, a Sunday school was organized at the Beech in 1881 but was discontinued for several years due to extreme opposition. It was resumed permanently in 1888 with the newly ordained John Sommer and Daniel Schmucker as the first superintendents. It was held only every two weeks, however, until about 1900.

Reasons for the Migration to America

It is well for us of the present generation to remember the motivating factors that brought our fathers to this country. As I previously mentioned, the refusal of the French emperor, Napoleon, to grant religious freedom in the way of military exemption largely prompted the Alsatian Amish emigration of the nineteenth century. This, then, was the situation responsible for the migration to Stark County, Ohio, even as late as the 1870's. The example of Peter Graber will serve as an illustration. When Peter was about to be drafted into military service he left his home in Alsace and started for America, going through Belgium in order to be outside French borders as soon as possible. When the French authorities called to summon him several days later, Peter was gone. Peter did get to America, and the following year his parents, brothers, and sisters, as well as other relatives joined him and settled

north of Canton, Ohio, where they joined the Beech A.M. Church. Peter Graber was a faithful member of the congregation until his death in November, 1937.

The Church Today

Now let us look at the church as it is today after a century of growth and progress. Nearly four hundred are enrolled in the Sunday school and there are 363 members of the congregation. A mixed chorus presents programs of music on special occasions. Over twenty Sunday-school classes meet every Sunday. O. N. Johns has served the church as bishop and pastor since 1925. John D. Miller (ordained in 1912) is the only minister since the death in 1943 of Alvin Hostetler, who was ordained in 1915 to replace John Sommer. The present deacon is John Sommers (ordained in 1936), a son of the minister who served from 1888 to 1915. Mahlon O. Krabill has served as superintendent of the Sunday school consecutively since 1926. Several thousand dollars are handled annually by the various treasurers of the church organizations. A monthly tithe offering of from \$500 to \$1200 is taken and all expenses and contributions are paid from this monthly offering. Two sewing circles, a young people's literary society, an annual Sunday-school outing, a men's brotherhood, and the home relief committee are some of the other activities and organizations. The ministry is supported by freewill offerings. Excellent congregational singing prevails. Harvey Sommers was one of the leading choristers of the previous generation and did much to maintain high standards of congregational singing. At the present time, missions, relief work, and church schools are actively supported. During World War II some \$20,000 was contributed to Civilian Public Service support.

Mission Station

Since the summer of 1938 the congregation has had a mission station in near-by Stoner Heights. This work was begun largely due to the efforts of Mr. and Mrs. Orris Yoder, and the first few meetings were held at their home. But the Beech Sunday School financed the construction of a building and the meetings have been held there since 1939. Lloyd Conrad was the first superintendent and was succeeded by Orris Yoder.

Merger with Mennonites

In 1926 the Beech congregation and the other Amish Mennonite congregations of the Eastern A.M. Conference merged with the Ohio Mennonite Conference, and thus since that time the congregation has been known as the Beech Mennonite Church.

Louisville, Ohio.

(This essay was awarded first prize in the 1948-1949 Mennonite history college essay contest.—M. G.)

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SAMUEL D. GUENGERICH

(Continued from page 1)

almost indispensable in many respects," and "Mental occupations are a pleasing relief from bodily exertions . . ."

After his preparation for teaching was completed he taught for a number of years. He was teaching in the Deer Creek School in 1904. He helped organize the German School Association which served the church from 1890 to 1916. Among some of his writings was found a paper giving "Principal Rules of the School." Rule 8 reveals some of the problems of his day. It says, "Rule 8, No bringing of pistols, powder, fire-crackers or anything of the kind to school." Number 9 of these same rules says, "All that we need is . . . good manners and thinking heads and feeling hearts."

He was also instrumental in the organization of Sunday schools as early as 1871 (American Sunday School Roll Book). This book lists S. D. Guengerich as superintendent, John B. Miller as assistant, and Mike Bender as secretary. The classes were conducted in German and English. The location of this school was not given but it was in Iowa County, Iowa. The White Hall Sunday School Register is among the above-named papers, being dated 1883. He was very active in this school.

Among the "Rules of the Pleasant Union Sabbath School" were the following (no date given):

4. All persons who become members of the Sabbath School shall strictly conform to its rules.

5. (Violators) . . . shall be discharged from school.

6. Discharged persons could be reinstated only after they "Faithfully promise to do better and conform to the rules of the school."

7. Spectators and visitors are also required to obey the rules. . . .

10. After exercises have commenced no member is allowed to leave or change seats.

His religious convictions are attested to by the fact that he was exempt from military duty during the Civil War by paying a service fee of \$300, the receipt being dated 1865. Two letters from Senator C. S. Rank of Iowa City indicate that he (Guengerich) was instrumental in getting a law on the Iowa Statutes, exempting people from jury duty because of religious convictions. These letters dated January 21 and April 4, 1896, promise to make an attempt to "pass the amendment and secure exemption." (Code of Iowa 1897, Section 333, and Senate Journal 1896.)

Among his business ventures was the Deer Creek Mills Dairy Association. The place of business was near the Hickory Grove School, on Deer Creek. The association engaged in the manufacture of butter. Farmers brought their milk to the plant where it was separated and they could take their skim milk along

home and the cream was then processed. The Articles of Incorporation were filed March 16, 1895 (Menn. Archives).

In his later years he was quite active in his little print shop where he did some writing, bookbinding, and printing. He printed a number of tracts and leaflets. He had a small supply of books and other articles for sale, though he never really commercialized in this work.

In 1878 he launched the monthly paper entitled "Der Christliche Jugend-Freund." This paper was published especially in the interest of Sunday schools. In the first number he began a continued article on "Geschichte und Ursprung der Sonntagsschule" (History and Origin of the Sunday School), which was run for a number of months. In his introduction to this article he says that since the paper is published especially in the interest of the Sunday school, he hoped that as people read it they will become more zealous supporters of this important work (the work of the Sunday school).

He was also instrumental in the success of "Der Herold der Wahrheit" which paper is still in circulation in 1949. He was editor and manager at its beginning and at his death was editor of the German part.

His zeal for the proper training of his children is shown by the method in which his family entertained company. When children came to play on Sunday afternoon he would gather them all into the living room where he would take from his desk a book, usually the Bible, and would read for some time, after which the children were permitted to spend the remainder of the afternoon in play.

Though he was never ordained to the ministry, never was appointed as a leader in a conference, nor was he the official leader in a church, his influence and zeal made its impression upon the people of his day. Samuel D. Guengerich died at his home in Johnson County, Iowa, on January 12, 1929, at the age of 92 years.

Kalona, Iowa.

THE INDEX FOR VOLUMES I-X OF THE MENNONITE HISTORICAL BULLETIN

The index for volumes I-X inclusive of the MENNONITE HISTORICAL BULLETIN has been inserted in the January 1950 number. We hope it will prove to be useful to the BULLETIN subscribers. The editors are offering for \$5.00 each the ten year collection of HISTORICAL BULLETINS bound in an attractive hard cover. The number of sets bound will be determined by the number of advance orders. Send your order to Melvin Gingerich, 1613 South Eighth, Goshen, Indiana, or to Ira D. Landis, Route 3, Lititz, Pa.

In September, 1950, a sample copy of the BULLETIN was mailed to every Sunday school superintendent in the Mennonite Church along with a letter giving the above offer. They were urged to call the attention of their Sunday school library committees to this opportunity of obtaining a complete bound set of the BULLETINS for their libraries.

Book Reviews

Harold S. Bender: *Conrad Grebel, c. 1498-1526, the founder of the Swiss Brethren, sometimes called Anabaptists. Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History*, No. 6. The Mennonite Historical Society, Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana, 1950; xvi & 326; \$3.50.

The publication of this long-expected book by Dean Bender marks a significant step forward in our knowledge of the background and early history of Anabaptism, written not from the outside by a disinterested scholar but with the warmth of one who feels the great legacy of the forefathers in his own lifeblood. H. S. Bender has long been a leader in the revivification of the original Anabaptist vision so little known hitherto by both scholars and Mennonite church members. He naturally saw the need for a thorough, scholarly, and yet sympathetic investigation into the very beginnings of Anabaptism during the Age of Reformation. As far as we know the very first Anabaptist brotherhood sprang up in Zurich, Switzerland (then under the sway of the Reformer Zwingli). The man who was the unquestioned leader of this bold, small group of committed disciples of Christ was Conrad Grebel, son of a noble family and an outstanding humanist of his own merit. On January 21, 1525, upon request, Grebel baptized Jörg Blaurock, a former Catholic priest of Grisonia, who in turn then baptized Grebel and the rest of the group present. Eighteen months later Grebel fell victim to the plague and died, hardly twenty-eight years old. The church of the Swiss Brethren (Anabaptists) was definitely established, and in blood and martyrdom started its way up—not too successful in Switzerland proper, and yet, at last, becoming the very leader of all free church movements of Protestantism.

Bender's book gives us a highly stimulating story; it is good reading, and contains much material to be thought through. The scholarship is amazing (over 60 pages in small print of notes), the judgment is everywhere fair and restrained, conclusions always well founded. The Appendix contains a foretaste of a planned second volume with Grebel's writings, presenting ten lengthy condensations, besides bibliography and so on. Eight plates add visual charm to the book.

It is not only the external and internal life story of Grebel which attracts the student of the great beginnings (and the inner story is made exceedingly vivid by interspersed quotations), the most valuable contribution seems to be chapter IX, "Things Most Surely Believed: Grebel's Theology." Here the basic tenets, still treasured today by most Mennonites, are put together from scanty sources. The center appears to be the idea of a "suffering church" which is to expect persecution from an unchristian world. Grebel's famous epistle to Thomas Müntzer is here the chief witness. On the

concluding six pages Bender evaluated the significance of Grebel and of the "Swiss Brethren" in the history of the Christian Church. It is the idea of uncompromising and committed discipleship which is recognized as the most important contribution of Anabaptism as it was first conceived among the Brethren of Zurich and their leader, the valiant and unswerving witness of Christ, Conrad Grebel.

Kalamazoo, Mich.

Robert Friedmann.

Melvin Gingerich: *Youth and Christian Citizenship*, Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1949; \$2.00.

One of the major issues in Christian history and thought is the relation of the Christian to the state. It is not a simple issue. The subject is further complicated by the fact that Christians are now, in the United States and Canada, standing in a tradition altogether different from the Roman state in which Paul stood when he wrote his great words of counsel to the Roman Church. Rom. 13. At that time the ruler was Nero, although Paul wrote before the full wickedness of Nero's heart had come to light. The great task of the state seen in Romans 13 is the maintenance of law and order. Christians are urged by the apostle to submit to the state authorities because their task is to punish evildoers and to "praise" those who do well. The Obenites, the Swiss Brethren, and the Hutterian Brethren understood the words of the apostle to mean the living of a non-resistant life, to turn the other cheek when smitten, not to sue at law, and the like.

The modern state, however, does much more than deal with crime and evil. The state has broadened its function until it now covers a multitude of items not thought of by Nero and his kind. It was therefore necessary that someone should think through the relation of the twentieth-century American to his government. To be of the greatest value to Mennonites it was highly desirable that this writer should also hold to the position of Biblical nonresistance. The writer also needed to be a scholar if he was to make the best possible contribution to the field. Yet his style needed to be clear and simple, not encumbered with the impediments of formal scholarship. These various requirements were happily met in Dr. Melvin Gingerich. Our author comes of a strong line of Amish Mennonite leaders; he is an alumnus of Goshen College, having taken work also at Hessian College; he has his Ph. D. degree from the University of Iowa with a dissertation on the Mennonites of Iowa; and he holds personally to the historic Mennonite faith. The book measures up to what one would expect; it is an excellent presentation in clear English of a wide range of studies dealing with the issues which all thinking people confront today. About two thirds of the chapters were published in their original form in the *Youth's Christian Companion*, and

were subsequently revised for publication in this book.

The reviewer would join in the wish of Harold S. Bender, chairman of the Peace Problems Committee of the Mennonite Church, which he writes in the Introduction: "May our youth find in it a valued source of vision, inspiration, and wisdom for the day in which they live."

Goshen, Indiana. J. C. Wenger.

Minutes of Ohio Conference a Century Ago

IRA D. LANDIS

The following minutes of one of the earliest Ohio Mennonite conferences can be seen in the Chester Township, Wayne County, Ohio, Old Order Mennonite Church, in German today. William B. Martin, Wooster, R. 5, has the translation of the same. It displays the practice of these pioneering brethren, consistent with our historic Scriptural position, but gives the names of the early leaders, some otherwise unknown.

"First, we confess it is not allowed (us) to meet the enemy with the sword, nor to go into military training.

"Second, we confess it is not allowed to hold worldly offices, nor to go to the election to vote, except for road supervisor, poor director and school director.

"Third, we confess it is not allowed to take any part as a juror in any worldly case whatever.

"Fourth, it is not allowed to use the worldly court to seek our rights.

"Fifth, we confess it is not allowed to follow the worldly fashions of dress.

"Sixth, it is not allowed to marry anyone outside the church. If any one violates this ruling, he falls under censure."

Undersigned brethren,
Jacob Muschler
Henry Stemen
Isaac Wilmer
Abraham Rohrer
John Miller
Henry Stauffer

N. B. Henry Stemen lived in Fairfield County, b. 1780, d. 1858. Abraham Rohrer of Lancaster County was in Medina County by 1832, bishop 1836, b. 1788, d. 1878, The rest I have not located. If you can, that would give more historical significance to this document. Stemen's death places it prior to 1858, possibly the rest even earlier, fixing it between 1843 and that date. The location of above would give the leaders in other sections of Ohio. Ashland County had three defunct congregations and others also.

Lititz, Pennsylvania.

